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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 000851

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY STEINBERG'S SEPTEMBER 27, 2009 MEETING WITH
DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER PHAM BINH MINH.

CLASSIFIED BY: Michael Michalak, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (SBU) September 27, 2009; 2:15 p.m.; The Ministry of Foreign
Affairs; Hanoi.

12. (SBU) Participants:

U.S.

The Deputy Secretary
Ambassador Michalak
Joseph Donovan, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State
Scot Marciel, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, EAP
Rear Admiral Charles Leidig, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Ambassador Joseph DeTrani, Directorate of National Intelligence
Derek Mitchell, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Pamela Park, Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary
Harry Kamian, Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy Hanoi
Michael Orona, Political Officer, U.S. Embassy Hanoi (notetaker)

Vietnam

Standing Vice Foreign Minister Minister Pham Binh Minh
Le Hung Hoang, Deputy DG, MFA Americas Department
Tran Quang Trung, MFA Americas Department
MFA notetaker

13. (C) SUMMARY: Deputy Secretary Steinberg used his meeting with
Vice Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh in Hanoi on September 27 to
highlight the value the United States places on Vietnam's role as a
non-permanent member of the UNSC and its responsibility in assuming
chairmanship of ASEAN next year. The Deputy Secretary urged
Vietnam to work with the U.S. and other partners to encourage
positive change in Burma. Minh replied that Vietnam would do its
best as ASEAN chair next year, but stressed Vietnam would continue
to respect Burma's internal affairs. Minh predicted it would be
some time before Vietnam concluded a legal review to determine
whether it could deploy troops abroad as part of global
peacekeeping operations. The Deputy stressed USG concerns about
the deteriorating human rights situation in Vietnam, and encouraged
Vietnam to allow us to increase Mission staffing to support the
expanding bilateral relationship. VFM Minh welcomed the U.S.
leadership in the Mekong Initiative and said Vietnam was looking
forward to building on the momentum achieved in Phuket last July.
END SUMMARY.

A Valued Partner in the UNSC: Iran and North Korea

14. (C) Deputy Secretary Steinberg opened the meeting by raising
the importance of Vietnam's role as a non-permanent member of the
UN Security Council during the last two years. He urged Vietnam to
back tough action on issues relating to North Korea and Iran,
including support of UNSC Resolution 1874, as Vietnam assumes the

Security Council presidency in October. Ambassador DeTrani added that North Korea's letter to the UNSC of September 3 was a serious step in the wrong direction; showing any weakness on UNSCR 1874 would only strengthen North Korea's position. VFM Minh responded that Vietnam supported the Six Party Talks, had demonstrated its commitment to non-proliferation, and had shared this position with North Korean officials. Ambassador DeTrani pushed back, stressing it was not enough for countries to support broad non-proliferation goals. All member states must send a strong, united message to North Korea that it must comply with UNSCR 1874. The Deputy Secretary added that enforcement of UNSCR 1874 was paramount, and encouraged Vietnam to use its coming UNSC presidency to exercise real leadership on this important issue.

Importance of ASEAN Chair in 2010

15. (C) The Deputy Secretary expressed hope that Vietnam would work to strengthen ASEAN when it assumes the chairmanship in 2010 and to accelerate regional dialogue on issues of concern. VFM Minh said Vietnam was conscious of the importance of the role it could play and hoped to "turn the ASEAN charter into reality and work to unify its members." He emphasized that Vietnam welcomed U.S. reengagement in Southeast Asia and promised to work to strengthen the Mekong Lower Initiative, which Minh claimed Vietnam was the first country in the region to support. The Deputy Secretary observed the Secretary was committed to initiative and looked forward to building on the progress achieved in Phuket last July. Minh noted Vietnam's concerns over climate change and rising sea

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levels. The Deputy Secretary agreed this could be an attractive area for cooperation within the context of the initiative. OSD PASD Mitchell Minh asked if Vietnam had concrete goals objectives for ASEAN. VFM Minh deflected the question, but predicted it would be difficult to achieve unity on the tough issues. When asked if ASEAN could play a role in resolving disputes in the South China Sea, Minh said "no," particularly since China is not a member.

Burma

16. (C) The Deputy Secretary told VFM Minh that the United States had completed its Burma policy review. The U.S. would engage the Burmese leadership and work with our partners, including ASEAN, to promote positive change there. The Deputy Secretary stressed the U.S. was not interested in "regime change." EAP DAS Marciel added that the U.S. would be meeting with Burmese officials in New York next week to discuss the new U.S. policy, and offer concrete steps the Burmese government could take to address international concerns. Afterward, the U.S. would ask its partners to reinforce this message to Burmese leaders in their private discussions.

17. (C) VFM Minh replied that GVN welcomed the "new move by the U.S.," adding that U.S. willingness to engage Burma was a positive development. However, he cautioned that Vietnam strictly respected Burma's internal affairs. While Vietnam had "good relations" with Burma and would do its best to serve ASEAN's goals, Vietnam would continue to respect Burma's internal affairs. The Deputy Secretary countered that the U.S. was cognizant of ASEAN's charter. However, some internal developments in Burma impacted neighboring countries and regional security. Therefore, countries in the region and regional organizations like ASEAN had an important role to play in promoting positive change in Burma.

The East Sea and China

18. (C) The Deputy Secretary reiterated that the United States had an interest in ensuring a peaceful resolution to disputes in the South China Sea, consistent with the UN Law of the Sea. Vietnam understood the U.S. position and also wanted "to find a peaceful solution, through dialogue, to this very complicated problem," Minh said. He added that China's claim was unacceptable and that in order to create peace and stability, all claimants must be able to register their concerns. Minh stressed that all countries in the

region recognized the importance of the South China Sea's shipping routes and added that Vietnam was willing to "show good will" in order to create stability in the region.

¶9. (C) Deputy Secretary Steinberg stated that the United States placed great interest in improving its bilateral relations with China and noted that this did not come at the expense of our relationships with other countries in the region. He added that the United States supported strong a bilateral relationship between Vietnam and China. The Deputy Secretary emphasized that China must prove that its intentions were peaceful and that its rise would be transparent in order to reassure other countries in the region. VFM Minh responded that Vietnam's overall relationship with China was good, apart from the obvious disagreement on the South China Sea, and hoped to increase China's relations with ASEAN next year.

UN Peacekeeping

¶10. (C) The Deputy Secretary stated that Vietnam could play an important role in contributing to the global demand for PKO troops. He highlighted the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI), and encouraged Vietnam to increase its participation. Minh responded that the GVN was "carefully considering its options," adding that he led a government delegation to Haiti as part of the GVN's review process. The MFA is finalizing its decision-making process. However, the MFA still needed to resolve outstanding "legal aspects" of whether Vietnam could deploy troops abroad under the existing constitution, a process that would take some time. The Deputy Secretary noted that many other countries had overcome similar issues and contributed troops to UN operations. Echoing comments made by the Defense Minister, Minh identified three possible areas of assistance if the GVN were to determine it could contribute PKO troops: demining, medical assistance, and road construction.

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Human Rights & Education

¶11. (C) Deputy Secretary Steinberg stressed that a free press and rule of law were vital to the stability and prosperity of any country, especially a country such as Vietnam which is trying to attract greater foreign investment. The Deputy Secretary encouraged Vietnam to take another look at the USG's UPR recommendations. Referring to his previous experience in academia, the Deputy Secretary stated that the U.S. was interested in exploring greater engagement on educational initiatives. However, he added that free and open scientific research was needed if the GVN hoped to reform its educational system and attract greater investment, alluding to a recent Prime Ministerial decree restricting the activities of independent research organizations. Transparency and good governance played a vital role in educational reform, he stressed. The Deputy Secretary raised concerns over the detention of several journalists, bloggers and others interested in the country's development, adding that detention of these individuals had an impact on our bilateral relations. He said that Ambassador Michalak would share a list of individuals of concern. Minh acknowledged the importance of human rights to the bilateral relationship. He said the GVN had accepted more than 80 percent of the UPR recommendations, and was looking forward to the next round of the U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue in November.

Moving Forward on Trade

¶12. (C) Touching briefly on trade, the Deputy Secretary stated that the United States was interested in moving beyond our Bilateral Trade Agreement, noting that the United States had been frank and transparent on the issue of GSP. Vice Minister Minh responded that he understood U.S. concerns regarding GSP, but suggested that the United States might be "too protective." He said that Vietnam hoped to have a better understanding of the status of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) by November when President Obama visits Singapore. The Deputy Secretary acknowledged that the U.S. was reviewing its position on TPP,

adding that stronger support from Congress as a result of positive steps on issues of concern was likely needed in order to move forward on trade issues with Vietnam.

Deepening the Relationship: Staffing and Visits

¶13. (SBU) The Deputy Secretary congratulated Vietnam on the establishment of a consulate in Houston. However, he pressed Vietnam to allow for an increase in the number of staff at the embassy in Hanoi and the consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. Minh agreed that further discussion was necessary. He remarked that while the United States and Vietnam had an on-going dialogue on a number of issues at various levels, the one level that was missing was President to President. He reiterated Vietnam's interest in having President Obama visit Hanoi when Vietnam holds the ASEAN chair next year.
Michalak